

## (THE SYNOD OF MAR YAHBALAHA 420 AD)

{37} Again, the synod of Mar Yahbalaha<sup>48</sup>, catholicos of Beit Lapaṭ, Nisibis, Fars, Armenia, Prat dMaišan, Hdayab, Beit Garmai, Gorzan, Beit Madaye, 'Aran, 'Abrašahar, Azerbaijan, the islands, 'Ištahar, Karka, 'Arzon, Šuš, Šošter, Balašpar, Dasqarta, Zabe, Piroz Šabur, Dargerad, Beit Daraye, Šabur-Kost, 'Ardašir-Prihad, Beit Šabur, Šimart.

(This synod took place) in the twenty-first year of the reign of the victorious Yazdgard, the King of Kings, whose kingdom has been prolonged by the grace of God for the sake of the tranquillity of the whole world, and whose mercifulness has spread abroad for the exaltation of the churches and flocks of Christ in all the East. (It occurred) during the administration of the blessed priesthood of the honorable, great, and elect of God, Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos and chief bishop of the East. (This was) at a time during the fifth year of his primacy when the honorable Mar Acacius, the bishop of the city of Amida, was sent on an embassy from the king of the Romans to the victorious and peace-loving King of Kings for the sake of the tranquillity and peace of the churches and congregations of Christ in the East, that he might repay by his coming the embassy of our father, the holy priest and honorable Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos and head of all the bishops in the East, (an embassy) which was (sent) from the illustrious, victorious King of Kings, who desires peace, in the nineteenth year of his reign<sup>49</sup>, and in the third year of the administration of the priesthood of our honored father, Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos of the East. He had been sent on the embassy from his own kingdom to the king of the Romans with honor and great pomp for the sake of the tranquillity and conciliation of these two kingdoms, which are the mighty shoulders of the world. At this time, when our two fathers, the priest-envoys, were constantly in the presence of the King of Kings in the city of Beh-'Ardašir<sup>50</sup>, all of us bishops of all the lands of the East gathered for the salutation {38} and veneration of our honored father, Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos of the East, and for the sight of his honorable brother, Mar Acacius the bishop and ambassador, and we offered this petition before our fatherhood and before the honorable Mar Acacius with one accord and with one will:

“Now that your fatherhood has gone up on an embassy to the West and your priesthood has been joined with the holy priests in those glorious cities in every ministry of the catholic church, and your honorable brother, Mar Acacius the bishop, has also come down on an embassy to this place, and has agreed with your honorable priesthood and with us upon all that is proper to the order of the priesthood, it is incumbent upon us that we ask for, write down, seal, and ratify with our seals and signatures the glorious ordinances which, through succession from the blessed fathers, the apostles, were fittingly established for the administration of the priesthood, as well as the steadfast laws and canons which were established in the synods of bishops which took place in the West at various times during the years of the truly God-loving Constantine, the victorious king, when the three hundred and eighteen bishops gathered in the city of Nicea, and the other canons which were established by the synod which took place in Ancyra of Galatia, and in Syria and Cappadocia, and the additional canons which were established by the synod [which took place] in the city of Caesarea, and the further canons which were established by the synod which took place in the city of Gangra, and the further canons which were

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<sup>48</sup> Ruled c. 415-420.

<sup>49</sup> I.e., AD 418.

<sup>50</sup> I.e., Seleucia.

established by the synod which took place in the city of Antioch at the dedication of the church, and the further canons which were established by the synod which took place in the city of Laodicea of Phrygia.”

Then he<sup>51</sup> gave orders to the notary, who took our dictation and wrote the same down with the agreement of us all and the unanimous will of our company:

“Since our worshipful God has spoken to the fathers of old in manifold and sundry ways<sup>52</sup>, and has especially lavished his assistance upon the race of men—even to this day employing his customary mercies (in his dealings) with those who call upon his name, visiting his church with all good things and bestowing helpful medicines through his associates and the heads of his flocks upon the sheep who are saved by his blood—because of the sincere mind of the fathers, the bishops who were gathered from time to time in holy synod, he placed in their mouth those things which were needed for the reformation, sustenance, and organization of the churches. By the power of the divine Spirit they received helpful, life-giving, and corrective laws for those who agree to the truth, that they might affirm the inscrutable Trinity and incomprehensible Lordship, that primacy might be arranged in order, the priesthood<sup>53</sup> preserved, the clergy<sup>54</sup> {39} maintained, and laymen delivered from the pit of sin. The order of penance was instituted<sup>55</sup> as (a means of) ascent for those before whom Satan, the enemy of humanity, had spread out allurements and whose offenses he had multiplied, troubling them with his hidden wiles. At the breaches which his perfidy had multiplied in the world they set up laws as watchmen and deliverers, that sin, because of the fearful sharp (sword-)point<sup>56</sup> in the commandment itself, might not be active but hindered, and from fear and dread of retribution its root might wither and it might not bear the fruits of lust through the irrigation<sup>57</sup> (provided by) pleasures, so that the enemy<sup>58</sup> of humanity might be smitten<sup>59</sup> withal by the blow which he (himself) strikes, and be slain by the slaughter which he (himself) renders.

“And because these things were established in the holy synod by the episcopal fathers in the tradition of the holy and Spirit-endued apostles, all the churches of Christ our Lord in the entire dominion of the Romans with all their leaders have long since gladly accepted and observed all these helpful laws with all diligence. Yet in the churches of our lands, (because) they have been deprived of these things, much confusion has existed, and disputes and divisions have been engendered from place to place because of disorderly rulers. The Christian flock has fed on trampled pasture and has drunk the waters which their strife has troubled. Sicknesses and diseases have multiplied in it, and for lack of commandments and therapeutic laws, the leprosy and corruption of sin has appeared in it, for such things stand in opposition to the tradition of the illustrious apostles and the direction of the holy synod of the episcopal fathers, and anger God, and through jealousy and strife they make the leaders disorderly and unspiritual.

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<sup>51</sup> The antecedent is not discernible. Perhaps should read “we commanded”.

<sup>52</sup> Cp. Heb. 1:1.

<sup>53</sup> כהונה for כהנים.

<sup>54</sup> Lit., “the covenant.”

<sup>55</sup> כהונה for כהנים.

<sup>56</sup> קנה.

<sup>57</sup> For קנה.

<sup>58</sup> For קנה. The subsequent verbs which have this for their antecedent are singular.

<sup>59</sup> קנה for קנה. The passive would make a correspondence with the subsequent parallel clause.

“Through the blessed Mar 'Ishaq, who governed the episcopate in Seleucia-Ctesiphon at that time, and the faithful Maruta the bishop, a few corrections were made in the churches of Christ. However, because they were not acquainted with the laws in their totality, in the fullness of the holy synod and in (its) accurate transmission, (and) especially because (these things) were not set forth in the canons of the episcopal fathers, they wrote those things which were necessarily requisite in a document at that time. When the greater part of our brother bishops (who) had been present had departed from the world, and these things had not (yet) been established, there was no perfect remedy for the previous disease, for ignorance had increased, and divisions and schisms have taken place in one place or another to this day, as it were from the old leaven of ignorance, because of the insolent, proud, ungrateful, and those who do not know reconciliation.

“Hence all of us bishops who, according to the will of our worshipful God, of Christ our Hope, and of the Holy Spirit our Expectation, have gathered from various places {40} to Seleucia and Ctesiphon with the fellow-ministers of our people, to our father, the honorable Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos and head of the bishops in the East, and to his brother, the honorable Mar Acacius, the bishop and envoy, together, in one divine love, in one true faith, and with one perfect hope, request of your excellency that these laws which were established by the illustrious fathers and blessed bishops in the catholic church of the entire dominion of the Romans, and up to now have been carefully and diligently kept there, be given to each one of us by your excellency, our honorable father, and the head and leader of us and of all our brothers, the bishops who are in the whole realm of the illustrious, valiant, and peace-loving Yazdgard, the King of Kings. By the hand of your excellency may we receive the perfect tradition of the laws of our fathers, that we might keep them diligently and meditate upon them day and night, and that they might become guides and enlighteners of us and our council. And for the kindness of your committing (them), all we ourselves—we and all who rise up in our positions after us and occupy our sees— will give thanks before the worshipful God for your undertaking. We have planted our feet in the correct way and tradition through your diligence. By the direction of your word we have discovered the protective commandments and redemptive laws of our illustrious fathers and blessed bishops. As we stand in the one true faith of the fathers, the bishops, which was handed down from the illustrious apostles, so too, we will together be led by the laws which their perfection established at various times so that there will be utterly nothing in the least matter different between us and them. As we all in one body are Christ, so too in the administration of the church we will agree in the one perfection of their divine and complete love and perfect order. Should one of us, with a haughty mind which does not draw near the worshipful God, venture to transgress against these laws, which the episcopal fathers have established, we shall cause him to be bound and anathematized before God and his Christ and his Holy Spirit for ever, as well as those who agree with his evil intention.”

Then our honorable father, Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos of the East, in the riches of his wisdom and the greatness of his enlightened understanding, opened his mouth in the presence of his brother, the honorable Mar Acacius the bishop envoy, and said (to the bishops), “Now, then, since you have this just and helpful intention, I am first of all prepared to fulfill in practice these things, and you too, according to your intention and the good will of your promises, must fulfill (them). Our worshipful God, who wills the assistance of all men, is also concerned about the stability and order of his church, that the shepherds of his flocks conduct themselves in holiness, chastity, and watchfulness, and that the members of his holy ministry {41} be resplendent, and the chaste clergy be preserved, and that laymen escape from the snares and traps of the Evil One. The spirits of the illustrious and blessed fathers who are worthy of a good memorial, the bishops . . . . . that they might be restorers of order in the churches of Christ by their chaste laws, and that every land might taste of the leaven of their steadfast teaching and

be confirmed in the balances of their faith which they received from the holy apostles. For the savory salt of their true tradition has come as far as unto us.

“As lovers of truth, discerners of what is fit, and proclaimers of the truth of the glorious Trinity, you have submitted your requests in writings. You have made known by this that because of the confusion which ignorance has multiplied in our churches we should give to your kindness the laws which the holy synod has established from time to time in all the West for the sake of the stability of the churches. The good intention of your agreement has been acceptable before us, for you have asked these things from us like (men who are) orderly, rational, chaste, holy, and honorable in manners. And since you have promised with a steadfast word to keep the laws, and have indicated to us that whoever transgresses against them shall be bound and anathematized, and since we too have so desired from the time that, with the help of God, we have occupied this office, we give to each one of you today the orderly canons which were established by the episcopal fathers of the West, which things you, having gathered to us in divine love, have requested in your writings with mutual agreement, that they may be kept by you with watchfulness. Let no one venture to transgress against any of them. What is more, we also agree to them with all our soul, and will be assiduous in keeping them with you and like you. And we determine binding and anathema upon those who transgress against these steadfast laws, that in all ways the wiles of the Evil One might be brought to an end, his snares broken<sup>60</sup>, his nets cut, and every high thing which is lifted up against the knowledge of God might be brought low.

“What the laws are which were established by the fathers in the holy synod your kindness will be able to recognize in such things as are set down in this writing. All of those previous things which were written in an edict in the eleventh year of the reign of the victorious King of Kings, during the primacy of Mar 'Ishaq the bishop, were written according to times and manners, according to the controversies of the time, and according to the laws of rulers. Since there was much confusion and there was disorderly tumult in various regions, fearful laws were established<sup>61</sup> according to the time for the restraint of the headstrong. They should be kept and not blotted out, that they may be a terror to others, and that no one may venture again to be occupied in the previous tumult.”

Then the honorable and illustrious Mar Acacius, the bishop and ambassador, along with {42} all of us bishops, said, “Even so they ought to be kept, and those previous writings should not be forgotten, for they have been established to this day to be for the discipline and terror of those who cause damage in a disorderly way and are prone to go beyond a mild limitation.”

We bishops who are here in the presence of our honorable father, Mar Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos of the East, and in the presence of our honorable brother, Mar Acacius, the bishop envoy, have written down and ratified these things with our seals and signatures, which we have written willingly and in one accord. Each one of us has acquired this book of canons, that by them we may be properly guided, and if any of us or those who come after us becomes divided against these things, he shall be estranged from the ministry of Christ.

I, Yahbalaha, bishop catholicos of the East, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Acacius the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.

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<sup>60</sup> ܐܝܫܩܝܘܣ for ܐܝܫܩܝܘܣ

<sup>61</sup> ܐܘܪܫܠܝܡܝܬܝܢ for ܐܘܪܫܠܝܡܝܬܝܢ.

I, 'Agapeṭa, bishop of Beit Lapaṭ, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Hoša', bishop of Nisibis, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Šaumi, bishop of Karka, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Theodore the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Doqa, bishop of Šuš, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Gora, bishop of Šoštera, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Šaṭman the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Garyan the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Baršma the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.  
I, Narsai the bishop, have ratified all that is written above.

The Synod of Yahbalaha is ended.